



# Viva la Diva

Adam Smith loves life with Avid's new budget Diva II turntable...

**T**he rise of the LP from the ashes, where various naysayers thought that it was permanently residing, has prompted an impressive resurgence in new models.

As is so often the case, the £1,000 price point has become a hotly contested arena as, not only is it still relatively affordable, but marking as it does a transition point from three to four figures, many people see this as a serious step towards the high end. Consequently products at or around this price are invariably notably better than something of, say, half the price...

Of course, the view can be a little different if you are a manufacturer known for more expensive designs, and the £1,000 point is where your entry level product lies. In this situation it is a case of downsizing your designs in order to see what can be removed, or what can be economised, without affecting the quality for which you

have become known.

Such a problem affected Avid Hi-Fi, as the original Diva turntable, a well respected design, was originally developed for Avid's Japanese distributor, with whom they no longer deal. Combined with the cost of raw material rising and making the deck uneconomical to manufacture, along with the fact that Avid's design styling had moved on, clearly the Diva II was inevitable.

Looking much neater, to my eyes at least, than its predecessor, the Diva II is based around a rigid one-piece cast aluminium chassis, that means "vibrations continually created by the stylus during playback are channelled to the chassis, through the main bearing and pick up arm and then rapidly dissipated", according to Avid. The bearing is similar to that used on the dearer decks such as the Volvere, and uses a similar clamping system to rigidly couple the LP to the platter. Speaking of the platter, this is an MDF item, fitted with the same type of mat as the more expensive models, which is based around a cork material. This is intended to provide a deliberate impedance mismatch with the record, in an attempt to prevent vibration

from entering the platter and thus causing distortion.

The platter itself is mounted onto a subplatter, which is belt driven by a freestanding synchronous AC motor. Avid state that "platter speed is adjustable through placement of the motor housing" which basically means that if it's running a bit fast, you pull it further away from the deck to reduce the speed by tensioning the belt. I'm not entirely convinced by this system, as when the motor is loaded like this, vibration is likely to increase, affecting wow and flutter. I also can't help feeling that if this works, then the motor isn't all that strong, despite Avid's claims of it being a "high torque" design. Fortunately though, the Diva II's speed was practically spot on, with little need to put the belt under too much tension.

The arm fitment portion of the chassis comes cut out with an SME type base, but with additional further holes for mounting plate adaptors to fit other arms, which can be supplied by Avid. Our review sample had an impressive chunk of machined metal fitted, containing a Jelco SA-250ST arm, which can be purchased for



a £300 premium over the £1,000 price of the armless deck. Regular readers will know that this arm gets a thumbs-up from me and it is a simple straight design that is nicely adjustable and feels very well built - it has a certain 'budget SME' feel to it, which is no bad thing!

**SOUND QUALITY**

From the first bars of music, it was clear that the Diva was going to be an engaging companion. It is a crisp and dynamic performer with plenty of emotion and presence, and a healthy dose of rhythmicity. In this respect it actually has quite a direct-drive character to it, as it loves a spry beat and hangs onto it with pleasing tenacity. Bass lines were deep and confident, with fine amounts of detail thrown in for good measure.

This meant that the bass guitar from the Eagles' 'Hotel California' was vivid, fulsome and highly tuneful, whereas it can sometimes drop into the background a little. In many ways, the Diva II apes its bigger brother, the Volvere Sequel in this respect, as both have highly capable low end abilities - more than those of us who are used to Garrard 301 levels of bass were expecting!

The rest of 'Hotel California' was equally accomplished, with the musicians nicely set up within the soundstage. The image pushes well outside the loudspeakers' boundaries but is not as well ordered as bigger brother, the Volvere Sequel, in the centre. That said, it was still not difficult to place instruments within the performance, and the Diva II is more than capable of putting you nicely into the middle of the action.

Across the top end, the Diva II is an open and inviting performer, with plenty of atmosphere and detail, whilst still managing to maintain an underlying smoothness without ever falling into the trap of being dull. I think the arm is a big helper here, as I have always found the Jelco to be a lithe and polished sounding arm that has the ability to tame hard sounding cartridges without dulling their innately extrovert nature.

Another plus point for the arm is

its midrange emotiveness. Much more involving than the rather stark Regas, the SA-250ST works well with the Diva II to bring out the underlying message conveyed by the music it is spinning. Instrumental character is well revealed and vocalists positively

soar from the loudspeakers - Diane Schuur sounded sublime on her track, 'Love Dance'. Frankly the only area in which the Diva II was a little uncomfortable was with processed, complex material, when it did have an ever so slight sense of muddle to it when things became more strenuous.

Compared to the pricier Scheu Analog Black Diamond, the Scheu remained more composed but, at the same time, it was notable that it did have a slightly more aloof character

to it. I felt that the Avid/Jelco combo was digging deeper into the heart of the music and finding the source material lacking, rather than failing to reproduce what was actually there.

**CONCLUSION**

The Avid Diva II is a very fine turntable. Well built, neatly styled and easy to set up, it's a highly capable addition to the £1,000 turntable market and the

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**

- Scheu Analog Black Diamond/RB250 turntable
- Ortofon 2M Black cartridge
- Whest Audio Two phono stage
- Anatek A50R Amplifier
- Spendor S8e loudspeakers

"it sounds like a mini Volvere, at a quarter of the price..."

optional Jelco arm suits it well. The resulting £1,300 combo is more than able to take on our current £1,500 favourite, the Scheu Analog Black Diamond, and is actually a little more emotive than the German contender with its Rega arm.

In many ways, the Diva II struck me as sounding like a 'mini-Volvere' and, at a quarter of the price of its bigger brother, but with far more than a quarter of the performance, it deserves a hearty recommendation!



**VERDICT**

Stylish, superbly built turntable that turns in an emotive and highly musical performance.

**AVID DIVA** £1,000  
**Avid Hi-Fi**  
 ☎ +44(0)1480 457300  
 www.avidhifi.co.uk

- FOR**
- solid, tuneful bass
  - fine image depth
  - smooth, detailed top end
  - build quality, styling

- AGAINST**
- nothing at the price

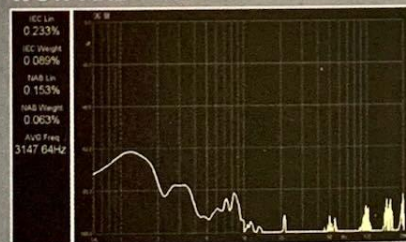
**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Avid Diva II turned in a wow and flutter measurement of 0.089%, IEC weighted - this is a respectable result at the price and should bode well for a stable and solid sound. Speed accuracy was good, the 3,150Hz test tone being resolved as 3,147Hz, and the speed remained stable during the measurement session. Some higher frequency flutter components are present but at a low level, so the bearing is of good quality.

The Jelco SA-250ST arm supplied fitted to the Diva II is a good performer under the accelerometer. Its main arm tube mode is at a low level and has a good level of damping, suggesting that the midband should be clean. The headshell is also less lively than many competitors which should take the sting out of the performance and ensure a smooth top end.

All in all, the Diva II measures well and should turn in a fine performance AS

**WOW AND FLUTTER**



**ARM VIBRATION**

